2:Gough E-4, 5 (1947-1949)1961 A Wll Kerala A Wll
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564 [361] tioned were called "high," "good," or "clean" castes. They lived in a separate portion of the village around the temples and the landlord's establishment, with each house in its own fenced garden. Except for the servant Nayars all might enter either Brahman or Nayar temples. Within this group, lower castes were forbidden to touch higher castes because of rules of ritual pollution, but individuals of different castes might approach each other within a few feet. Equal interdining took place only between caste fellows, but members of lower castes might *receive* food from higher-caste hosts. In ritual terms these castes thus formed the upper ranks of society, although only the Nayar retainers and those above them were economically and socially aristocrats. Nambudiris and two small castes of their temple servants were patrilineal; all the rest were matrilineal.

101 121 564 I have designated as "Nayars" all the castes which bear this title today. They are not a unitary group but a named category of castes. Traditionally, the title Nayar seems not to have been extended to all these castes. Before 1498 the military Nayars or retainer Nayars were called Lokar (Ayyar, 1938: 32). What the other matrilineal castes were called is not known. "Nayar" was not then a caste name [703] but a title conferred by the king on lineages whose members had won special military honor. The Portuguese called all the soldiers "Nayars" and during the period of European trade it seems to have come into use as a title held by all the military castes. Some Nayars say that the temple menial castes and the matrilineal castes of washermen and barbers usurped the title only during British rule, in order to raise their status. The higher temple-servant castes, although matrilineal, never adopted the title because they ranked above the military Nayars and had honorable titles of their own. This paper primarily concerns the Nayar military retainers, their village headmen, chiefs, and royalty.

THE HIGHER POLLUTING CASTES

564 162 621 The high castes were the religious and secular aristocrats and their personal servants. In many respects the polluting castes lived a separate social life, being located in a different part of the village. They included, in order of rank, Tiyyars (called Iravas in Cochin), who were palm-wine makers and tenant farmers, with twenty to forty households per village; Kanisans or astrologers, with one to three households per village; the artisan castes of blacksmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, bell-metal workers, and stonemasons (who ranked equally), each with one to three houses per village; low-caste washermen and barbers (who ranked equally), each with one to five houses per vil-

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613 592 681 [687] [703] his whole property group might be put to death. Conversely, the property group as a whole was rewarded for extraordinary military valor on the part of one of its members. In a period of conquest of a new district, the king sometimes removed from office recalcitrant village headmen or even chiefs of the enemy side and replaced them with property groups from among his own following. Again, when a soldier died fighting with exceptional bravery, his chief sometimes rewarded his property group with a plot of land held on a special military tenure, under unusually favorable terms.

As we have seen, the property group had the prime responsibility for an individual convicted by the neighborhood assembly of offense against the religious laws of caste.

613 592 681 692 The kāranavan's day-to-day authority over his juniors was conferred upon him by his feudal lord, backed by the judicial authority of the king. He had the right to command and discipline all junior members. In cases of extreme disobedience he might inflict corporal punishment on the women or children, or cause a junior man of the taravād to do this. He seems to have had the right temporarily to expel from the household and to deny maintenance to junior men who insulted or disobeyed him. As manager of the estate he also had disciplinary rights over the taravād's tenants. In serious matters the tenants had recourse to the village headman, perhaps to the chief, but their own master settled minor disputes among them and fined them for small offenses. In law a kāranavan appears to have had complete rights of life and death over his property group's serfs. A very few cases are recorded of his exercising it to the full. More common are the stories of extraordinary loyalty between serf and master, especially of serfs who died fighting to defend their lords' homes. Their spirits were rewarded with a place in the taravād's ancestral shrine.

613 592 681 692 703 It is clear that whatever his *de jure* authority, the kāranavan's *de facto* authority was greater over women and children than over junior men, who were often absent on military service. It seems probable that at these times soldiers came under the direct legal control of officers of the kingdom and that in at least some contexts their property groups were not held responsible for them. We know for example that if a Nayar soldier murdered another he was tried in the court of the king or of a feudatory prince and, if convicted, was executed promptly by four or five of his peers, presumably without his property group being consulted or punished. Thieves caught within the boundaries of coastal towns seem to have been similarly dealt with (Barbosa, 1518, quoted in Ayyar, 1938: 284–286). It may be that their

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property groups were held legally responsible for Nayar men only when they committed high treason or when they became engaged in disputes and offenses within the neighborhood of their birth.

It seems probable that the kāranavan's powers over his juniors and over their property were limited by the codification of law which came about during British rule (Aiyar, 1922: 33–132). It is not clear whether he could traditionally alienate land without the consent of other adults of the taravād; during British rule he could not. British law also permitted appeal to the court by junior members for the removal of a kāranavan who could be shown guilty of gross mismanagement. He could then be set aside in favor of his immediate junior. An inefficient kāranavan could moreover be forced by the court to maintain accounts of his income and expenditure. Since 1933 in Malabar District and 1938 in Cochin, all kāranavans have been legally obliged to do this and to make available their accounts for inspection by junior members once a year, as provided in the Madras Marumakkattayam (Matriliny) Act, 1933, and the Cochin Nayar Act, 1938. However, few juniors avail themselves of this right, which is evidently repugnant to the traditional ideals of obedience and trust toward elders of the taravād.

Even traditionally, however, both junior men and women were often consulted in the management of the group's affairs. If a dispute arose between minimal segments of the taravād it was common for appeal to be made to an arbitrator of the caste from outside the lineage. The settlement agreed upon would be embodied in a document called a *kārār*, which legally bound all adult members. In large taravāds the allocation of separate houses and sometimes even of separate land to each segment was usually embodied in a kārār. All land continued to be managed by the kāranavan, but he paid a sum of paddy each year to the senior woman of each household from the land allotted to her segment.

Kārārs were, however, common only in village headmen's, chiefly, and royal property groups. Too little property was usually involved in the case of retainer Nayars, among whom effective daily management was divided between the kāranavan and the oldest woman. As we have seen, the former carried out all formal transactions outside the group, controlled the estate *in toto*, and disciplined men and boys. The latter organized feminine tasks and held more informal authority over women and small children. When the kāranavan was the son or younger brother of the eldest woman, management usually ran particularly smoothly. The oldest woman might indeed be *de facto* head

13:Thurston & Rangachari E-4, 5 (no date)
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company of Nāyars for the honour of the Valluvanad Rāja. And probably the frantic fanatical rush of the Māppillas on British bayonets, which is not even yet a thing of the past, is the latest development of this ancient custom of the Nāyars. The martial spirit of the Nāyars in these piping times of peace has quite died out for want of exercise. The Nāyar is more and more becoming a family man. Comparatively few of them now-a-days even engage in hunting." According to an inscription of the King Kulōttunga I (A.D. 1083-84), he conquered Kudamalai-Nadu, *i.e.*, the western hill country (Malabar), whose warriors, the ancestors of the Nāyars of the present day, perished to the last man in defending their independence.*

The following description of the Nāyars at the beginning of the sixteenth century is given by Duarte Barbosa.† "The Nairs are the gentry, and have no other duty than to carry on war, and they continually carry their arms with them, which are swords, bows, arrows, bucklers, and lances. They all live with the kings, and some of them with other lords, relations of the kings, and lords of the country, and with the salaried governors, and with one another. They are very smart men, and much taken up with their nobility. . . . These Nairs, besides being all of noble descent, have to be armed as knights by the hand of a king or lord with whom they live, and until they have been so equipped they cannot bear arms nor call themselves Nairs. . . . In general, when they are seven years of age, they are immediately sent to school to learn all manner of feats of agility and gymnastics for the use of their weapons.

* E. Hultzsch, South-Indian Inscriptions, III, 2, 1203.

† Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar. Translation. Hakluyt Society, 1866.